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RYAN STARINSKY

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KRANG

during that second, i could feel my head weighing heavier; the tide, strong and slow like a locomotive approaching another stop. my eyelids open and close, soft like doors, undocumented to all but myself, as if we were meant to remember each moment when we actually realize something we hadn't known before.

what i see now are things at ease, things that rest and never bleed. these things keep me here staring, a small voice reminding me to do something, like change the clocks, sound of an older man yearning for his untroubled body back, his sharp mind; the way he remembers himself—even still defending wars and friends, telling me he believed in them.

we're walking on a tangent in a field of flowers wearing the sun's skin, where everything just looks beautiful. (sure, once a vision of the long haired mailman now crossing the yard, pretending to blend in.) what will just be when we know where we're going, when we walk with purpose.

i remember when you stood in another room describing us as tumbleweeds. the last words i can remember feeling. you were blunt, you were true and i bought it. after that though, things felt different, the silence was enough to know who you'd been talking about.

having the time to focus on the darkness, hiding that reverence you let brush against your arm, never trying to hold it in your hands. like finding a cartoon birthday card of a kid holding his father's axe, reminding me of when i was young and untouched, buried in a shoebox. we belong to our minds.

yer old bike

it was one of those nights when we really had to concentrate on getting home. even though you lived in allston for a few years at this point, each street corner, littered with dark glass and dead leaves, looked the same. red bricks stacked in banal yet strong skeletons and a concrete passageway that cuts through the precise city plan restricts us to unfamiliar sidewalks. but i just moved here, how could i be expected to recognize this so quickly?

the day before we rode our bikes in the summer-like october weather to the grassy yard that held up the statehouse. we sat, took pictures, and ate lunch. cambridge finally started to look beautiful to me, like an older man or woman. the bikes that we swerved in and out of traffic with now stand separately; mine locked comfortably on our front porch and yours pushed through the clumsy, wet night.

eventually we found the overpass that hangs above the mass pike; leaving lower allston, heading home. you grew tired of pushing your rusty old bike and decided to lock it up to a street sign outside of a friends apartment. the funny thing is this wasn't even your bike, it was your friend's, she let you borrow it. you had it for so long, it just felt like your own and it was easy to take for granted, especially when you knew you were getting a new one in the mail the upcoming week. so you left it there. the cold metal frame stands lonely under an irritating orange glow cast from a street-light. like in the spotlight, ashamed of the attention. we stumble on, and get home.

don’t stop smoking

the ceiling fan cooled the empty old room to no avail. no furniture, no decorations, not even moving boxes filled our southern crash pad. for some fresh air, we had to squeeze through the window to venture the roof where he could light up. after he yanked open the wooden-latch that so tenaciously locked the window shut, he took the tiny blue lighter he bought at the gas station from his pants pocket, lit a parliament that he swore he’d quit by the end of the summer and watched the smoke disappear into the darkest wiry sky. we talked about where we’ve been so far and where we’d be going in the next couple weeks. boston came up and we wondered how it would be. i’d been there once since i had moved away. i’d actually already been thinking of it since i saw that empty room. it reminded me of my bare bedroom, sleeping on a hardwood floor and climbing out the window to the fire escape to watch other people smoke. i wanted, now, to stop talking, to stop sitting at the fuel pump and sustaining other people’s habits; to stop feeling guilty. but i kept talking and kept feeling homesick for a place i hardly knew. i imagined it as a place that i could go back to, but i knew that was not true. it was more important to me than i could ever be to it. and out of my frustration i could yell to all my friends from this roof to stop smoking, but he would be the only one to hear my pretentious opinion disguised in my slang as good advice. an empty stigma. he doesn’t want to hear my mouth spilling with concealed nervousness for the reality of my instant world. a false pretense. and boston is just a city that is thirteen hours away. i see this in the picture that is painted in front of me as i stare off at the lit up parking garage, a white and red blinking radio tower and one lonely smokestack spitting out nothing, feeling disappointed; a real dead scene.

short hair

in the mirror i see
what the winter has done to me

dark purple bags
emphasizing a tired
unfocused glaze of
cold bruised questions.

a lock of
hair grown long
like a buried
tumbleweed
piled in the back pages
in some old trunk
somewhere
used as bookmarks.
deserted in a mine field.
ditched at the movies
its the same.

moments of
spontaneous
feeling.
a sudden change

for diamond-eyed
summer
days when
the shade

echoed
the death of
a specimen.

a navy blue soul
made to believe
in words
rich with
an alluring
lack of poise.
longing for warmth.
the foreman
every couple months.
this is a time i will remember.

snip. snip.
birds coughed
the day i cut my hair off.

the couch

“can i sleep with you tonight?”

the bluish-green glow from the forgotten tv illuminates my darkened figure, cradled in a sound system. it takes a while before your eyes adjust, before you notice it was me. shaking your head out of the afghan draping your body. half asleep you motion for me to just get under the covers, your brain too scrambled to even connect the sentences, too weary to dream straight.

we lay together in the living room, where you have slept as long as i could remember, telling me because he snores too loud. i knew there had to be more to it, like this rerun of cheers keeping me from dreams of a school that i could better understand. there had to be more to the witty jokes of bar stools talking about sports and women, always there while you are on the couch.

your arm glides over my tshirt shoulders as i shy my eyes away from the screen and into your chest. the clicker fell out of your hand to the crumb carpeted floor radiating a familiar touch that calms my anxious incineration. forgetting i’ll have to face others in the morning until i dress for the snow outside to get there. the uncertainties of tomorrow weigh on my young mind with black colors as we drift together through the darkness like mother, like son.

playing with the girls across the street

what you are to me is what you have shown me. a brown and black dog, Apocalypse, wearing your old handkerchief, the one you had tied around your leg the night the kids next door moved away, the ones you and your sister traded little purple hair clips and tie-dyed scrunchies with, sitting under the apple tree in the backyard, you both cried for days, all the creases wore out by now. her weathered collar grips the veins in her neck, blocking hidden tunnels you discovered with your friends on the river, the ever-rushing power of experience and knowledge can last one second, yet you can remember the last time you saw a person forever. while we travel through these tunnels casting growing shadows, thoughts in the dark, helpless without a companion to, at the very least, eat with.

sharp, white teeth clamp down like a decaying bridge, falling as perfect puzzle pieces at the bottom of it all. she yawns with her tongue out. neatly trimmed dog nails hang over the back-seat of some mini van or station wagon, or something, screaming through the oldest highways the middle of America has ever known, with punk rock mix tapes splurging from the middle dash. the center of it all.

sitting on her seat belt, she barks when she's upset, whether when reminded of the world's flawless impurities that hide in the dark, usually to kill the human spirit before its twentieth year,
(when it neeeeeds a career,
and the money is dear,
leaving small things to fear,
scared of everything you hear,
coming right up the rear;)
the reality we share

or, the lonesome half-moon sitting on her shoulder, mumbling and drunk with affection; the day i saw you standing in the kitchen where i daily cook and breathe i may have met you, but she is how i know you.

you will never become familiar with [natural] beauty

as the children disperse amongst the playground, katherine silently walks toward the picnic table with her thin strawberry hair swaying in her face. her eyes focused on the muddy splotches of grass, though her mind soared elsewhere. visions of this morning dance around her tiny little head. i notice her isolation from the other kids, her classmates, her friends, so i approach the warped wooden table perhaps to cheer her up. i ask "how was your day today, katherine?" in an optimistic cower, "lousy," is all i get out of her. after a few minutes of asking more questions i look up into the sky and see swirled white clouds guided by a bitter wind. gaze into the bare branch bobbing up and down, its all part of the picture. the neatly shingled roof of the school shielded by a flurry of gray. the sparkling spots of the afternoon sun. katherine with her elbows both on the tabletop holding up her smooshed freckled face; but now, talking. and i can hear every word.

she tells me that her cat threw up this morning, five times in five different places in her house. and there was blood on her deck. in the backyard were footprints in the snow that she claimed belonged to coyotes. "do you really think coyotes could have come into your backyard? could those tracks maybe just be your cats?" i question. "Bigby would never run away for this long, he's afraid of it out there, he always comes home," she shoots back. "everything just felt like a rush this morning."

i couldn't believe it when she told me that her parents had already said that if Bigby didn't come back then they can't get another cat, and suggested a fish for a future pet. when the word "fish" regretfully splat out of her mouth i could see her young heart break in her glared eyes. the cup of skin below was filling up like a bucket of water underneath a running faucet. attempts of comforting her fell short, i changed the subject. i talked about the school day. she talked about how this is all she could think about during the school day. "my parents have posters with Bigby on it. it says 'missing cat'." this conversation was so honest, rubbing shoulders with the human spirit. the words i heard captured my full attention though my mind saw it as though watching an aging film strip with no words or music. the uncontrollable having

found clarity.

another adult puts her arm around katherine and asks her what's the matter. already warmed up, she spits out the same story she told me. then the adult pulls katherine aside and asks her to go for a walk and holds her arm around her tiny body. it becomes another story. and the wind still rushes through the playground as i stare off into the beauty of the day knowing that i will never become completely familiar with it. the reality of the bitter coldness that we all play in has hardened some new skin. the capability of holding something more, something tangible squeezes the passions of youth without giving them much of a chance. while katherine waits by the fish tank for Bigby to come back home, i'll think of her sitting right in front of me and i'll remember that there's nothing i could do.

dictator on the blacktop

a crisp cold breeze
brushes his cowlick back
and forth
swaying between his focused
yet comfortable
eyes.
meeting with a mirror
image only these rings
glaring with
the strongest desire
to swear out loud.
but he can't say certain
bad words.
he just
couldn't.

echoing from within his young brain
rules to the game
his rules.
he goes,
"underhand only,
no spuds on A,
tsunamis,
electric lines, shoe shiners,
magic box, bus stops, and tea parties
are ok. no rainbows
or re-do's,
and no cheap stuff!"
he chuckles as he rubs
his hands off on

the muddy rubber ball.
he has certain thoughts in his mind,
enough to encourage
the tattered at the knees
blue jeans
old sneaks,
pavement pounding nosebleeds.
this is where he gets greedy,
“A gets two dictatorships and
B,
gets one.”

robins pluck out the worms
from the moist dirt,
eventually,
scared off by a charging
troop of children
shooting play guns.
what was i aiming for when i was younger?
i can’t remember anymore.

“and that’s not fair.”
if he were to cheat,
who could stop him?
beyond the fence,
two dogs being walked on leashes,
chained around their necks, bark
in each others faces,
drool, drenched
frustration.
instinctively proving something,
or at least trying.

before the sorry ones
could speak up;
“democracy,
who thinks that was out of bounds?
raise yours hands.”
the bell rings.
it’s too late.
some kids start to cry,
being all recess the loser.
preyed on by the one with the ball,
the two-timing, freckle faced gumdrop,
the dictator on the blacktop.
one to conquer them all.

glass twins

during my lunch break i decided to walk around the city, my early afternoon stomach felt like cold lava dripping down into a secret cave, making sounds. as i turned i saw you two in the pizza place through the glass. one of you were waving from the dimly lit table and the other walked toward the window, squinting, pointed your thumb toward the ceiling as if trying to let me know that i'm alright, in general. if it was always that easy to know someone likes you, that someone appreciates you, would it matter? i didn't walk in to talk. knowing in the back of my mind that i wouldn't ever see you again, at least the young you, the only you i've ever known, pizza sauce on your face and olives in your teeth, looking at me like you could tell me something. i just waved and kept walking, my mind hazy with visions of you running and yelling and grabbing my arm, scared of the wind. lost track of time and had to get back to work. i stopped into the corner store and stole a candy bar, wishing i could split it with the two of you, but there is more than glass in-between us now.

wildflower

inside of her
poached the absolute necessity of change
the pulling of her youth the instinctive urge
of a six-year old for an impromptu
hair-cut. standing on phonebooks
to see herself in the mirror.
dead hair falls
to the floor like molted feathers
the shade of her adolescence.
the dirty blonde sun
she so carelessly holds
in her hand.
not a care, not a worry.
i can't think of a more honest way of living.
yet her illicit heed coaxed only herself
the lone wildflower
standing in a wrought field
allowing the breeze
to unravel her mind
releasing into the air the gaiety
she so keenly embodies.
through her wild eyes
her wild mind;
i see her corolla
unprotected and bright
not a cloud in the summer night
to shade her beauty.
all she asks is to dance like a child
beneath the soft sound of her breath
like a secret

like a promise
both of which her mouth never speaks.
she’s never heard
of war
or of death
only thoughts of star-gazing
in bloom, teacup visions
unkempt and alive.

side a or side b

(four clicks)

the needle scraps and ingrains
visions of kids in Brooklyn
singing about girls.
a vibrating pulse on my hip
of a love
too patiently young to
ever develop
distracts me while
the room fills with strangers
hip airheads
lost in denim.
kissing each other
with words they read
in books written for
a different generation.

“do u wanna meet up?”

i find myself
one with
the dullness
of the bass
though
each note
kicks me
in the chest
a little harder.
a part of me

is dancing
while a part of
me is gone
looking around
somewhere where
things get stuck in my head
like her
freckled nose or
a song about it.
sitting on the bed
everyone just talks about the bigger city.
“ya know,
Ginsberg was that kid once
on the Lower East Side”
writing in the rain
it’s a world away from
getting stoned
in the midwest
right?

“yeah, maybe some other time...”

black eye

hid in my bedroom
for four days.
slept with the cat.
ignored the buzzing phone.
couldn’t come to your doorstep
with a black eye.
embarrassed of attention.

cigarillos negros

a fake victorian streetlight loses its purpose below the old firehouse sign scaling the brick. the great fireproof hotel hosted early motion pictures and touring theatrical productions, filling nine hundred seats with big back pocket socialites mingling with the big city. it was a taste of the arrogant air. now, the gray sign hangs rusted and frail, shielding the same colored rain from my head as i wait for the night owl. my canvas feet soak up the puddles that are being splashed their way, and water drips from the middle of my faded blue hood. and to think, i'm standing in front of the only firehouse in town that didn't burn.

the sidewalk bunched with sunken eyed button ups hailing cabs in their crocodile skin shoes, as if proud enough of themselves to still be out at night looking for a certain love. the tearing of passing cars on the pavement sounded like newspapers being ripped to shreds. headlines of wrongful arrests and football scores scattered the soaking streets. all the while, a young latino smoker rounds the corner of the great fireproof hotel extending a black umbrella, with dark wings spread out protecting the cigarette smoke from certain disintegration. coasting through the air like golden robins, we're tangled. a pair of two worlds that are intense and strange, complete only in our own heads. we watch each other with a sharp, corner eyed stare that leaves the pit of my stomach feeling empty and bare until finally, we both board the bus, silently paying our fare.

i sit down in the first open seat in the aisle, quickly shifting over to the window, almost as an invitation. the discolored fingers of the smoker tap the swinging handle hanging from the other side of the bus, a transparent ring shining in the dull light. if not for the swindled hours of our day, how could our eyes recognize the stillness of a wild love? looking out through the glass, i watch the racing raindrops stream down the reflection of my cheek.

"tenth avenue." (the first words). i flee as the doors open, the rain falling a little harder than before. looking over my shoulder, i catch a dark silhouette of the

androgynous smoker, puffing away as if blowing into the face of a solitary love but where do we hold the beloved before they fade?

a new, peculiar loneliness tantalized me on the cold traipse home. dirty water trickles from the gutter, my front porch light left on and i sink my soaking shoes into the welcome mat and consummate the keyhole.

bike lock

walked outside [of Bat Chapters while the last band was still playing] and her bike was locked to his bike [which was locked next to my bike that didn't have any bike locked to it] so i left, biked home.

of the same litter

the bed is falling apart, imagining little red bloodstains appearing on the sheets that refuse to stay on, they can't even pretend now to mold this mattress. your heels kick back at me in the shin a couple times in between scratches from the bottom of the door. each scrape at the wood reminds me of the parts of you that have already been splinted off, chipped away, laying now on the carpet only to be kicked around and taken from a place of comfort, an old record you keep close to your ear. i lay awake mesmerized by each tear as if into your hardened skin, orchestrating the rise and fall of your body.

the brightening of the sky discharges a howl between the two houses. spitting high above the attics, the wind changes the room into a tomb. the door latched shut by a silvery pick, opening and closing with a squeak, each time blending with the voice of the moaning cat. i toss and sigh, aching for your attention. you wake up with concerned sleep settled in your eyes. our mouths collide with precision while the tops of the cars outside your window are brushed naked with a low voice. the snow glides through the air, white and cold, eventually evaporating with the wind. our bodies turn one color, sinking into each other like a technicolor vice binding two similar moods on a ring.

a cat in your litter is calling your name in a way i cannot be familiar with, a calming voice that sounds to you as warm as your touch to me. almost as if speaking a secretly learned language. catching eyes with him in the crack of light in the wood startles me, opening and closing with a diligent push like deep breaths. the slit i fall into, immersed with knowing how you feel when i'm not around,the things you say. the cat swipes your phone across the floor, scrambling words you've said and meant.

you leave the room with wet eyes, living happily within love, letting in the cat. slowly and methodically marching in his backyard, he passes through the carpet he used to piss on. the smell remains the same until he leaps to the bed, finding me in a dark-eyed daze sitting in my own allure, feeling alone at the moment. he looks me in

the face, pierces his claw through my purple ankle and sticks his tail in the air without swaying it much. you lift him from the bed, quietly reentering the room with a blurry smile.

“i see you two have meet.” i look up at you without lifting my neck, a thankful look on my face. after you curl up with me we will fall asleep, passing different people in our dreams, bringing animals out of assumption into daunting scenes in the film strip in our brains. pausing on the heightened instances of passion, a feeling that cannot last. i wipe the cat hair from the pillow in a hypnotic trance, forgetting about our love and letting my mind just have yours, past and present.

the day i $tarted believing in god

the highway was covered with dispensed ice falling from a gaping hole. my hands gripping the first coffee i ever bought, a bitter, warming styrofoam. while receiving assurance that the car is all-wheel drive, i sense the tires slipping from the passenger seat, burning my hand. after an hour of driving we reach the halfway point of our journey, ashford, ohio. just another afternoon ice storm in the midwest. we take the nearest exit. as we pull into the parking lot of the gas station i feel a little anxious, maybe bored. i pull the door open to the convenience store and decide that today i will play the lottery.

i take a roundabout way to get to the cashier (a young looking teenager, with human gap teeth and blonde hair on his chin) because a couple was squeezing through the tight aisle stocked with candy bars and bubble gum. i tell the kid behind the counter that i want a scratch off ticket. he pulls one from behind him, says he looks at this particular one everyday. it hung upside down as he tore it from the rest. he slides it across the counter in a way that made me feel guilty of something, his smirk and persistent eye contact alienates me from the interaction. “do you see it?” he asks. not knowing exactly what he means, but noticing that betty boop was posing upside down with her cleavage popping out of her tight dress. i could not see what he wanted me to. “look at her chest, i look at this everyday.” he insists i look at her cartoon boobs though i can hardly look at his face. i see two perfect circles that eventually look like a male’s genitalia where a long red torso is added in the middle. i say something along the lines of “would you look at that” or “that’s crazy, man;” words that mean nothing. i paid him two dollars and left the store detached from what was simply a conversation between two human beings.

after scratching off a winner, i had to make the decision to just keep the card and look at it everyday, and think about that kid or cash it in so i could buy more coffee and styrofoam.

thinking of everything

there was a thinly stretched cloud moving overhead, buckling a little from what pushed down on it, like a sharp nail held to a balloon. you pulled on her familiar hand with mild urgency, causing her to lose her balance and almost fall like you had around this time yesterday. when you sat in the mud, water rose, waves of embarrassment impaired your vision of her standing beside you. now you hold three of her fingers like the handful of acorns you collected earlier, now tucked away in her front pocket for safe keeping.

loud ridges on the tips of her fingers surprised your soft hands, abstaining your nail on the divots. you nearly scratched your thumb while lost in the idea of something harsh, something different.

“why are your hands like that?” you asked with tepid wonder, amongst other things rattling around your mind.

“well, i play electric guitar and stuff.” she said absentmindedly as a worm itching for the grass.

the green blades caper among themselves, dressed up and dreaming of the wind that ensures their soundless routine, which they were missing. the shadow of the building only allowed the patch at your feet to shine, you thought of the moon.

“oh, that’s cool.” is all you said as you sat down, bringing your head to your bent knees, grabbing at a bug in the middle of the field, fenced in but real. you put it on a crumbling leaf, the color of your hair, a neatly cut bird nest with flower patterns that you wear. you held it with tender admiration, giving yourself a reason to keep your jeans dirty forever without even knowing it. you felt a raindrop land on your forehead first, wondered how that didn’t hurt and let go of her grisly hand to wipe it away. your friends running by pull you ahead by the wrist, racing the looming storm, dropping the bug in the now darkened grass. you broke loose and ran inside behind the rest thinking of everything.

big sur death drop

the california republic was the end, her open ended birthplace, like a brief shower, your foot nudging mine on shadowed stairs, a passing meteor in the sky. these are things you can never know, things we claim to cherish. reaching out with our thinning imaginations that only remind us of the smell that night. she was a big sur death drop, a constant struggle between land and sea. a gang of howling seals at the bottom of a cliff haunted something inside of someone, passing it to you like a note from a world that i found myself happy in; passing it to me.

the things around me that i've been becoming, swing again as the van changes lanes, cutting through hills, closer to you. but all i see are choppy waters, my ears pop passing the bay. the dull red steel that represented my first impression of you costs me six dollars to cross, but i don't mind. *i didn't know you until i felt you*; the cold fog that sunk into my skin through the rushing window, moving fast through my veins, waking me up. it's the bitterness that you can acquire soaking in an entire ocean of cherry coke and emotionalism; the innards of the beast entering your city. the city you were to me, but not the even the city you grew young and aimlessly angry in; *a dirty feather reluctantly shining in my eye*.

i'm getting high on the freeway trying to picture a nirvana smiley face tattoo on your thigh; the color of your clothes. walking up sidewalks on my tippy-toes swearing that we don't have a god, setting me apart from the old tie-dyes with shopping bag arms, and young people working two jobs to say they are the bay now, they all hurry by. "too many sunshine pills," they'd say of eager feet avoiding cracks on judah and sunset. familiar streets. *you seemed embarrassed when you told me you grew up with orange trees, it was then i saw in your unguarded eyes, tearing through your tough skin. a small green promise of a spontaneous truth that i found myself believing in. you said with a hoarse accent that beauty can be captured, like a tiger in a cage.*

the rolling fog above the prison of past souls surrounded by water are all forgotten as *two sweaty bodies sink into each other like wooden skeletons, eroding bones splinter*

into each other, aching for happiness.

“i don’t know why you kept asking about me,” is all i thought as I kicked the loose stones, not able to comprehend intention among the darkened clouds. but when you said under that distorted yellow streetlight in ohio, “you decided to come...” like you were surprised, the clouds that seemed so heavy hung high but the grey sky just bluffed.

my heart doesn’t feel like the answer now though, beating harder in the backseat miles from there.

i’d imagine if we’d happen to bump into each other, we’d be matching aside from the blonde freckles that fell like confetti onto my pillow. *i couldn’t remember the sound of your voice for much longer after you left*, perhaps distracted by your last simple look that weakened everything. your eyebrows sank low as the corners of your lips pulled back like an eight year old at a slingshot. i wasn’t sure you’d think of me again, as you skipped a step or two down the porch, back to your van.

there was a moment minutes later, a dusty box fan blowing in my face, that i wanted to cry, i think i wanted love but not really. i stood alone, brains more scrambled then before. like dead crickets in a mason jar, quiet birds take flight in the morning sky. i don’t care to recognize everyone’s adult looks anymore, like some expected understanding. playing games and fucking around like anybody else; as i look out beyond the moving glass i’ve been glued to, i see those adults running along the bay but i’m stuck on black pen scribbled on faded receipts, oh my mind! when i drowned my eyes and saw a swine, in the feed where we hide our thoughts from things we need, tucked away in my desk, stamps and envelopes stuffed in sadder books than i could ever dream i’ve lived. the words i couldn’t say to you unless i bumped into you, black short twins displaced in things that have already happened. we’d talk and that would be enough for me as that california sun blinds the land and the sea.

Ryan Starinsky resides in Columbus, Ohio where he plays in numerous bands, including the Sidekicks. This is his first chapbook of poetry.